

Communicating Science in the New Millennium

A two-day conference in January, "NIH: Communicating Science and Health in the New Millennium," underscored NIH's renewed emphasis on ensuring that information from basic and applied biomedical research is made immediately available to citizens, health providers, health educators, and decision-makers. The conference, hosted by NIH Director Harold Varmus, brought together 300 members of the NIH communications community, along with outside researchers, journalists, and administrators. The conference was the first one held in the Natcher Building, a new, state-of-the-art meeting and conference facility on the NIH campus.

In his opening remarks at the meeting, Varmus charged attendees to help NIH address three challenges in communicating research: recognizing what needs to be said, delivering the message, and identifying and responding to the audience NIH must reach, which includes a diverse public with varying levels of literacy. Anne Thomas, director of the NIH Office of Communications and chair of the conference, presented a video during the opening session that highlighted NIH communications and featured scenes of the press conference conducted by Varmus, NIEHS Director Kenneth Olden, and NIEHS scientists following announcement of the discovery of the breast cancer susceptibility gene, as well as a segment on Martin Rodbell, NIH Scientist Emeritus at NIEHS and co-recipient of the 1994 Nobel Prize in Medicine.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, dean of the Annenberg School of Communication at University of Pennsylvania, delivered the conference's keynote presentation. Jamieson pointed out that NIH must leave behind the old transmission model of communications, where messages are simply imparted to the audience. Current technology and culture demand an interactive model of communications, she said, providing new structures of access to information and allowing a dialogue with the public rather than a lecture platform from which to speak to passive listeners. Jamieson noted that the news media relies upon drama and conflict to define news, and these elements sometimes upstage or distort informa-

tion about health and science in the news. She also noted that NIH trust and credibility are invaluable, and that in partnerships with private industry to deliver health messages, NIH should take care to avoid the appearance of compromise which may lead to a loss of public trust.

The conference featured a series of panel discussions followed by work group sessions on topics such as health communications, news/mass media, and reaching audiences of ethnic populations, youth, patient cohorts, and low literacy groups. In the work group sessions, NIEHS reported pioneering efforts in outreach to ethnic, low-income, and underserved rural and urban communities. The NIEHS outreach program serves as a model for other NIH efforts.

Samuel Silverstein, president of the Federation of Applied Science and Experimental Biology, asserted that NIH grantees have a responsibility to acknowledge the source of their research funding and to explain not just the results of their experiments but the implications of their findings to the diagnosis, prevention, and cure of disease.

Women at the Bench

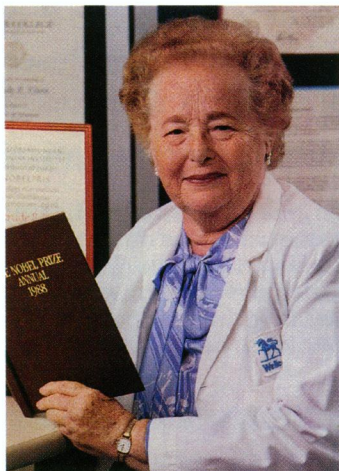
Women scientists, their accomplishments, and their career paths are the focus of the NIEHS Distinguished Women Scientists Seminar Series that will feature five seminars, including one by Gertrude Elion, 1988 Nobel Laureate and Scientist Emeritus at Burroughs Wellcome Company. Suzanne M. Snedeker, a scientist at NIEHS and chair of the organizing committee, said, "In addition to presenting a formal research seminar, the speakers also will lead an informal discussion about

the paths their careers have taken. We hope this dialogue presents a rare opportunity for senior women scientists to talk to junior scientists about their research, and how they successfully broke through the 'glass ceiling' that has affected the advancement of women scientists."

Sponsored by the NIEHS Division of Intramural Research Women Scientists and the NIEHS Office of the Scientific Director, the series will continue from March through September and is

open to the public. The research seminars will be held at 10 a.m. in building 101, conference room B, at NIEHS's South Campus in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. The schedule follows:

- March 2: Patricia K. Donahoe, chief, Pediatric Surgical Services, Massachusetts General Hospital. Donahoe was the NIEHS Hans L. Falk Memorial Lecturer in 1992 and will speak on "TGF-beta Receptor Downstream Interactors in Growth and Differentiation."
 - March 31: Alice Huang, dean for science, New York University, will speak on "Neuronal Pathways Utilized by Vesicular Stomatitis Virus after Intranasal Inoculation: Determination of Site(s) for Interference."
 - May 8: Elaine Faustman, professor and associate chair, Department of Environmental Health, University of Washington at Seattle, will speak on "In Vitro Developmental Toxicity Assessments: Application for Mechanistic Evaluations."
 - June 28: Thea Tlsty, associate professor, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, will speak on "Disruption of Genomic Integrity in Tumor Progression."
 - September 7: Gertrude Elion, 1988 Nobel Laureate and Scientist Emeritus, Burroughs Wellcome Company, "Challenges of Pharmaceutical Research."
- For further information about the seminars, contact Claudia Thompson, (919) 541-4638.



Gertrude Elion

Burroughs Wellcome

International Groups Consult on Prioritizing Chemicals

In January, 60 representatives from 14 countries, including international and intergovernmental organizations and industrial associations, met at the NIEHS to give advice on prioritizing chemicals for international risk assessment and related issues. The meeting was co-sponsored by the International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and supported by the NIEHS, the EPA, and the governments of Japan and Canada.

Since 1973, 284 chemicals have been recommended to the IPCS to be internationally evaluated for health and environmental effects, and over 80% of these chemicals have been evaluated in some manner. Criteria adopted previously for selecting chemicals for evaluation include:

- Adverse effects: data support the conclusion that the substance presents a potential hazard for human health and/or the environment;